New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1945

Volume VI, Number 17. • Yearly Subscription $15.00 • Week of November 12, 1945

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Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS : : : 235 EAST 22ND STREET, NEW YORK 10, N. Y.

"The Rich Full Life"

New York World-Telegram

NOVEMBER 10, 1945

Vina Delmar Play Has Sense, Value

By BURTON RASCOE

I wish, very sincerely, to recommend "The Rich Full Life," by Vina Delmar, which opened at the John Golden Theater last night. It is a quiet and simple story. In it there is no jumping about or people racing in and out of doors. There is not a gag in it that you have already read in a newspaper column and can nudge your neighbor with your elbow in gleeful recognition of how bright you are that you get the point of the joke. It is simply a drama of dignity, sense and value.

The story of "The Rich Full Life" is about all of us. The message is simple, It is: Don't smother anybody you love with kindness.

Gilbert Miller has given the drama a magnificent production and has, himself, directed it with creative imagination. He has starred Judith Evelyn, about whose abilities I have commented upon so much hitherto that I shall say no more, except that (in my opinion) she is one of the very finest actresses I have ever seen.

Fine Child Actress.

Nor has Mr. Miller stinted himself in the matter of casting the other parts; for he has Frederic Tozere playing the role of Miss Evelyn's husband; and Mr. Tozere is a man who knows his business to the nth degree as an actor: he's superb. . . . Also there's a potential new star in Virginia Weidler, as the daughter of Miss Evelyn and Mr. Tozere. She's been in the movies, but after this Broadway, too, will recall her for her acting talent as well as beauty.

No actor or actress in "The Rich Full Life" gets a bad break, either in the text or direction. So I must make my deepest bows to these others in the cast: Jessie Busley, Edith Meiser, Sandra Holman, Frank M. Thomas, Jonathan Braham and Ann Shoemaker; for they have contributed of their best.

Made an Invalid.

The play is about an only child —a girl—in a conscientious small-town family. An in-law, who is a physician, has very early declared that the child has pernicious anemia and must never be subjected to drafts or infection. As a result, she is treated like an invalid up until the time she is ready to have a beau. She accepts her invalidism and nearly succumbs to it, until she is dated, through an accident, with the most popular boy in high school for the senior prom. This date means life to her. Yet, papa, aunt, doctor and all the in-laws, think it is murder for her mother to allow the child to have her night of fun in life, especially as it is such a rainy night.

The answer, as Miss Delmar has written it, and as Mr. Miller's cast has presented it, is that people can be killed by kindness and solicitude.

'The Rich Full Life'

A new play by Vina Delmar. Presented by Gilbert Miller last night at the Golden Theatre. Staged by Mr. Miller. Setting by Raymond Sovey.

THE CAST

Lou Fenwick	Judith Evelyn
Mother Fenwick	Jessie Busley
Carrie	Edith Meiser
Cynthia	Virginia Weidler
Fredonia	Sandra Holman
Lawrence	Frederic Tozere
Fred	Frank M. Thomas
Ricky Latham	Jonathan Braman
Miss McQuillen	Ann Shoemaker

New York Post

NOVEMBER 10, 1945

"Rich Full Life" Not Good Enough for Judith Evelyn

By Wilella Waldorf

Vina Delmar has run up a little playlet out of old women's magazine clippings, called it "The Rich Full Life" and sold it to Gilbert Miller. Mr. Miller, who has already disposed of the movie rights for a colossal sum, produced it last night at the Golden Theatre just as carefully as if it amounted to something, and even went so far as to star Judith Evelyn as the mother who wants her delicate daughter to go to the Senior Dance even if it means pneumonia tomorrow.

To say that one expects more of both Mr. Miller and Miss Evelyn at this stage of their respective careers is merely to repeat an obvious truism. Of course one expects more of Mr. Miller, but if he happens to feel the need for a little Hollywood gold, no doubt that's his business.

It does seem to us, however, that once he has safely hauled in the West Coast ducats, and Broadway gets its fill of seeing Miss Evelyn do a real ironing on the stage, Mr. Miller might do something for the theatre and star her in a play commensurate with her ability as an actress.

For Judith Evelyn is, as the saying has it, an actress to reckon with. The only trouble is that we almost never get a chance to reckon with her.

Presumably the new play market is rather feeble just now. Well, what about an old play then? Personally we should like to see Miss Evelyn swing through the classical repertory from here to there and back again. What's that you say? No movie rights?

Oh yes, we had all but forgotten "The Rich Full Life," and we're supposed to be reviewing it. Let's see. The Fenwicks have a going-on-seventeen daughter who catches colds all the time and never gets to go to parties. Her father, who's in the hardware business, and her uncle, who's a doctor, coddle her dutifully, and the rest of the relatives give helpful advice, but Cynthia is one of those girls with a frail constitution.

But when Ricky Latham, a senior and the catch of the school, asks her to the Senior Dance, her mother sees that she goes even though it rains steadily all week just as if Sadie Thompson were in the vicinity. The night of the dance itself a series of cloudbursts occur and Cynthia gets very, very sick.

Her mother, who wanted the child to have a decent time for once in her life, really did a very brave and noble thing to send her to the dance despite the weather, although you can hardly expect the relatives to believe that. Miss Delmar resolves all this rather foolishly in a bad third act.

Virginia Weidler is properly thin and appealing as the daughter who gets away from the medicine chest at last long enough to fill up on chile con carne, Frederic Tozere plays the hardware-loving husband with a blunt-instrument expression, and Ann Shoemaker turns up briefly but effectively as a nurse who likes the bottle.

But it's Judith Evelyn who matters, if anything does at the Golden. It's about time she had a richer, fuller life on Broadway.

DAILY NEWS

NOVEMBER 10, 1945

Judith Evelyn Gives Distinction To a Soap Opera, 'Rich Full Life'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Vina Delmar's new play, "The Rich Full Life," is a simple tale of a teen-age girl and mother love which could be knocked off in 260 quarter-hour radio shots, Monday through Friday mornings—or about an inch of type like this.

What gives it undeserved merit is the playing of the mother by Judith Evelyn, who is a fascinating actress. Once, and for a long time, Miss Evelyn was the mentally tortured Mrs. Manningham in the thriller, "Angel Street." Now she is a middle-class matron in a middle-class town and she is quite wonderful. She believes in style in acting—believes in working upon a part with all the resources of an intelligent, humorous and stage-wise person. It is always heartening to see a player do more than walk through a role.

Also worth welcoming in Gilbert Miller's production at the Golden Theatre is Virginia Weidler, of the movies, who plays a teen-ager with assurance and charm. This is her stage debut and she performs like a veteran.

Wants Fun for Daughter.

Miss Delmar's play (already set for screening and possibly the starter for a series like Andy Hardy or Dr. Kildare) might have been, instead of a play or a filler-in between wireless commercials, a piece of fiction. It would have been obtainable in a magazine that weighs two pounds and costs four bits, but you have to pay extra for patterns. As a drama it should do quite well at matinees.

"The Rich Full Life" is an ironic title. Miss Evelyn is married to a man who runs a hardware store and who believes the rich full life is having a home, raising children and never raising hell. She accepts her fate with more humor than bitterness—but she wants a little more fun for her daughter.

Trouble with the child is, she's frail. Runs temperatures, gets sore throats and catches colds at the drop of a hat. When her Dream Prince asks her to the high school dance it's a very big thing, so she starts coming down with something just out of excitement.

Risk or not, Mamma lets her go to the dance. In the rain, too. It's a wonderful, wonderful dance—but of course afterward Daughter becomes a Very Sick Girl and nearly dies. The third act is highly clinical and I expected Uncle Fred, the doctor, to call in Lionel Barrymore for a consultation, but he didn't.

After materia medica has just about given up hope for the Very Sick Girl, Mamma effects the cure by calling up the Dream Prince pretending she is the child speaking, and asking the boy to come on over for a visit.

Miss Delmar has a good, pat way of writing and some fun in her, too, so her play isn't as sticky as it could have been. But what is pat without a mike?

There are nice performances by Edith Meiser as an acidulous sister-in-law, Jessie Busley as a mother-in-lawly mother-in-law and Ann Shoemaker as a trained but not housebroken nurse. Frederic Tozere is properly dull as the father and Frank H. Thomas, as the doctor, just worries and worries.

Journal American

NOVEMBER 10, 1945

'The Rich Full Life" Opens at the Golden

By ROBERT GARLAND

Vina Delmar has written and Gilbert Miller has produced what is more than likely the first dramatization of the common cold. With Judith Evelyn as star, with Virginia Weidler and Frederic Tozere as featured players, it came last night to the Golden Theatre. There, encouraged beyond reason by a classy congregation, it ran itself upstairs and down in Raymond Sovey's designed-for-running setting.

Why Gilbert Miller, of all producers, decided to sponsor "The Rich Full Life" is something he and Metro-Goldyn-Mayer alone can tell. But sponsor it he has, with a cast out of the showshop's higher brackets and direction out of his own tasteful theatrical experience. Without this cast, without this direction, Vina Delmar's cold-on-the-stage easily could have proven really fatal.

With this cast, with this direction, and with an orchestra playing nice nostalgic music in the balcony, "The Rich Full Life" is neither more nor less than a mild, not to say seasonable, Broadway ailment over which there is no need for anyone to worry. Dr. H. A. Coveler, the Golden's House Physician, could cure the patient in a jiffy. The trouble is, nobody speaks up and asks him.

* * *

So Cynthia Fenwick remains a sickly sort of heroine. One cloud floats in the sky and poor dear Cynthia must take to bed and stay there. Everybody on the Golden Theatre stage insists that our young lady has the sniffles. And, where the daughter of the house of Fenwick is concerned, one sniffle brings on another, another brings on pneumonia. Quinine, it seems, is yet to be discovered!

And that is the story Vina Delmar, playwright, Gilbert Miller, producer, and Judith Evelyn, Virginia Weidler and Frederic Tozere, major performers, are stuck with. Not only are they stuck with it, but they're called upon to make it eke out an entire evening. Eking out that entire evening, sickly Cynthia is forced to stand upstairs in bed during no little of the play's duration.

It is true that she stands downstairs on the sofa for a portion of the time. Once, for an all-too-fleeting moment, she stands prone upon the landing of Mr. Sovey's stairway. Again, in an off-stage rainstorm to end all off-stage rainstorms, she goes out in the open to a Junior Prom. But no matter what she does, no matter where she does it, the sniffles drag her down and do her in for fair.

* * *

Ironic Title

We're on happier reportorial ground when I get around to saying that Vina Delmar's cold-on-the-stage is given careful actorial attention by Gilbert Miller's cast from the showshop's higher brackets. Under his detailed, devoted and meticulous direction, "The Rich Full Life" ever so often gives signs of changing miraculously from the short story it is to the three-act play it isn't.

Judith Evelyn, one of the theatre's more admirable actresses, is in fine, if futile, fettle as the Lou Fenwick who is our sickly Cynthia's frustrated and irate mother. Here is "the rich full life" referred to ironically in the title. So convincing is her reading that I wish she were reading Ibsen's Hedda Gabler. Or even Nora!

Making her Broadway debut, Virginia Weidler, as Little Miss Sniffles, is easy on eye and ear when keeping away from the tricky letter "R." Frederic Tozere is to the manner born as Little Miss Sniffles' tiresome papa. And such outstanding standbys as Jessie Busley, Edith Meiser, Frank Thomas and Ann Shoemaker are cold-fearers par excellence . . . Nevertheless, "The Rich Full Life" remains a fair-to-middling short story that tries to be a first rate play. The common cold definitely remains undramatic.

"The Rich Full Life"—*continued*

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

NOVEMBER 18, 1945

By HOWARD BARNES

On A Treadmill

AN assortment of vignettes passes for a play in "The Rich Full Life." Vina Delmar has had a keen eye for character in the new offering at the John Golden Theater. She has probed into a mother-daughter relationship with considerable subtlety and power on occasion. What she has failed to do is to knit her recognizable people and her honest situations into a driving and cumulative dramatic whole. Even with the superb portrayal of an aware mother by Judith Evelyn and the adroit staging of Gilbert Miller, it is a fragmentary production, leaving one inevitably disappointed.

* * *

The pity is that several of the fragments are so instinct with meaning and emotional evocation that they would have graced a stage work of some stature. The scene in which a wise woman overcomes her natural maternal protectiveness to let her frail daughter attend a high school dance is eloquent and even poignant. Her terrible vigil during a cloudburst, when she knows that the girl will probably suffer physically from her decision, is beautifully integrated. The climax, in which the youngster's dance partner is deceived into pulling her through a pneumonia crisis, is contrived and sagging. It leaves the whole show on a treadmill.

* * *

The piece has not been neglected in its presentation. Miller has selected an expert company for its performance. Raymond Sovey has designed a proper and practical setting for the random action. For a time last evening, "The Rich Full Life" held forth great promise of going somewhere. With Miss Evelyn gently rebelling against the drudgery of married life with a hardware merchant and having to conspire against a group of staid in-laws to give her daughter her version of the title, there is more than one rewarding moment. Virginia Weidler makes the semi-invalid a splendidly complementary character.

* * *

Then there are Frederic Tozere, giving a restrained portrayal of the fellow who loves hammers and nails; Edith Meiser, as a self-centered sister-in-law; Jessie Busley as an understanding matriarch, and Ann Shoemaker, who contributes a vivid bit as a nurse who has been blacklisted in the community for having had a few on her time off. It is typical of "The Rich Full Life" that the last-named actress dominates a scene without proving a thing in unifying the proceedings. Miss Delmar has observed better than she has wrought. At any rate, there are bits of valid theater at the John Golden.

PM

NOVEMBER 11, 1945

—Kronenberger—

One Act Too Many

PM Reviews

This is really getting to be quite a season. They not only can't write shows any more for people who like to go to the theater after dark; they can't even—to judge by *The Rich Full Life*—carry through a fairly easy assignment for the Schrafft's-and-a-matinee ladies, the drama-by-daylight girls. For two acts, to be sure—even though I personally wasn't having much fun—it looked as though the matinee trade might be getting a break, as though Vina Delmar might be crowned this season's Rose Franken. But then came Act III, and Franken suddenly turned to Frankenstein. Not in quite a spell have I sat through such embarrassing twaddle, such nauseating rubbish; and I think that even the bon-bon brigade will find Act III more than they can take, and turn thumbs down on the play.

Miss Delmar's first two acts are, I suppose, an adequate job of *Cosmopolitan* Magazine realism. The Fenwicks have been married for 18 years; the wife, a naturally lively and amusing woman, has been pretty well worn down by her dull, stuffy husband and her "sensible" in-laws. The Fenwicks have a teenage daughter Cynthia, a pretty but sickly girl who is always running temperatures and catching things, and has consequently had no fun in life, no real youth. Suddenly a popular senior invites her to the big dance of the year. The night of the dance Cynthia has the sniffles and it's teeming rain; but over the protests of the prudent Fenwicks, the life-loving mother lets her go to the dance anyhow. She has a wonderful time; but you know she's going to be powerful sick.

That far, it's all harmless enough. There are little mother-and-daughter scenes, husband-and-wife scenes, boy-and-girl scenes; and the little drama of Cynthia's dance gives edge to the conflict between the stuffy and the spirited way of life. Furthermore, Judith Evelyn is so very good as the mother, so much more interesting than the part itself, that she gives the first two acts of the play a needed lift.

But then comes Act III, with Cynthia very, very sick in an upstairs bedroom. Here Miss Delmar loses her head, and goes in for every dodge of drivel, every piece of sentimental tommyrot, you can imagine. The result is a real and ruinous mess, a kind of dreadful bathos, which on opening night aroused low nervous laughter at points where it presumably was meant to jerk tears. Even Miss Evelyn was eventually floored by it; doubtless it would have floored Duse or Rachel.

Mr. Miller's direction is in general competent, and so is the supporting cast. Virginia Weidler makes a very nice Cynthia, and Frederic Tozere a properly stuffy husband. And Raymond Sovey has designed a skilfully dispiriting set. But all to no effect; the last act wrecks the play.

—Louis Kronenberger.

The New York Times

NOVEMBER 18, 1945

Sentiment Clogs 'The Rich Full Life.' Vina Delmar's New Play, Which Opens at the Golden

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Vina Delmar has come back to the Broadway wars, many years after "Bad Girl" and obviously a reformed character. "The Rich Full Life," which Gilbert Miller put on last evening at the John Golden, is so filled with the sentimental things of life that the normal masculine reaction is to reach for a hat and run. Possibly Miss Delmar's new play might seem better at a matinee, where according to the supercilious view standards are different, but even that is doubtful. For two-thirds of "The Rich Full Life" give the air of treading water while waiting for a climax, and when the last act comes it is so heavy with sweet scent as to be incredible. When Miss Delmar and her associates grow maudlin they leave nothing to chance.

* * *

The thesis is that in addition to good works, a little fun must be added to make the rich full life. The Lawrence Fenwicks have a daughter who always has been sickly. The captain of the high school swimming team asks her to a dance, and although she has a cold and stage rain beats down on the roof, she is allowed by her mother to go. Desperate illness is the result, and while relatives wring their hands and the doctor all but gives up, the mother effects a cure by the simple process of asking the boy over for a visit. Miss Delmar's argument, expressed by the mother, is that the daughter may catch cold, but she also will have a memory to set by for the coming days when the washing is heavy, as is marriage. Probably there can be no quarrel over that.

There can be much, however, over the manner in which "The Rich Full Life" sets it forth. When she is dealing with trifling matters about the home, Miss Delmar can be brisk and occasionally amusing. Unluckily a play must keep going after the housework is done for the day, and since she has time to kill, Miss Delmar repeats herself, holds conversations which have nothing to do with the subject and answers the telephone and doorbell. Into the last act she has thrown the works, even to the sick child tottering down the stairs. During the earlier parts of the play, the author has planted characters she will need at the end, and there is a certain morbid fascination in watching them come back in their obvious parade. Seeking honestly to discuss a question, "The Rich Full Life" is dishonest when it reaches the platform; it offers candy instead of argument.

* * *

Judith Evelyn is the mother and over the greater part of the evening plays it very well. At the beginning the light touches supplied by the actress do not always fit in with the girlish sentimentality of parts of the dialogue; perhaps it is better so. For the rest, she is sincere and capable and makes the mother a real person among so many who are not. Virginia Weidler is the daughter and she, also, is agreeable. The trip down from her sickbed is one of those things which sometimes confront an actress, even the young, and is not her responsibility. Frederic Tozere is property sedate and stuffy as a sedate and stuffy father; Edith Meiser, Jessie Busley and Frank M. Thomas have other parts. Mr. Miller directed within a pleasant middle class setting by Raymond Sovey.

The Sun

NOVEMBER 10, 1945

'The Rich Full Life' Repetitious and Slight, With Honors for Miss Evelyn.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

Judith Evelyn fascinated playgoers for many months as the tormented Mrs. Manningham in the menacing gloom of "Angel Street" and did her playing at the theater bearing the name of John Golden. Now, returning to the stage of this same playhouse, she gives further proof of her skill and resourcefulness with a vivid performance in the role of a mother and weary housewife, caught up in the routine of a humdrum marriage.

"The Rich Full Life" is the Golden's new play, presented last night by Gilbert Miller. Vina Delmar wrote it. A skimpy and repetitious play, it brings forth family-life touches in effective detail and for two acts it is acceptable theater. But in the final act Miss Delmar's little play falls apart and even Miss Evelyn seems to become affected by the general collapse.

Gilbert Miller has done a generally neat job of staging, certainly for two-thirds of the evening, and perhaps he isn't to be blamed for the odd goings-on in an act that the author simply didn't write.

"The Rich Full Life" is about a mother, aware of her own frustrations, who is determined that her 16-year-old daughter, delicate in health, gets the fun in life that other girls have and while she is of the age to have it—and before she comes to a routine of homemaking, dusting, ironing, cooking, goldfish-feeding. The daughter is asked to the senior dance by Ricky Latham, who is quite the catch of the school. Cynthia, beautiful in her new dress, is sent off to that dance, notwithstanding family opposition and a cloudburst. She comes down with a fever and there is actual concern for her life, but it's the distraught mother's prescription that a little more of Ricky will bring about a cure. And the play leaves you with the impression that Cynthia will be good for quite a few more dances before she takes up the grind of the rich full life as her mother has known it.

There is some observant writing in Miss Delmar's play—recordings of squabbles, small irritations and hostilities, little fretfings and feudings. There are some good characters, too. But the sparseness of the play is apparent throughout and there is considerable dependance upon the telephone. And always upon Miss Evelyn. There is range and variety in her performance and she manages somehow to hold the play together for two acts. It is a little too much to ask that she save the third.

Frederic Tozere gives a believable performance as the complacent and methodical hardware man, who likes his easy chair beside the radio. Virginia Weidler, another young player from the screen, is quite delightful as the daughter, so susceptible to chills and fever. There are good characterizations from Jessie Busley, Sandra Holman, Edith Meiser and Anne Shoemaker.

"The Rich Full Life" is a vast improvement over Broadway's recent fare, but it is still a play of very definite shortcomings. The evening's honors are Judith Evelyn's.

"The Girl from Nantucket"

The Sun

NOVEMBER 9, 1945

'The Girl From Nantucket' Is a Ragged Musical Show, With Dreadful Book.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

"The Girl From Nantucket" is one of the very worst. This awkward and disconnected song-and-dance piece, presented last evening at the Adelphi, offers routine music and lyrics, a dreadful book, and a general level of entertainment that makes the ill-fated "Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston" seem something to be pleasantly remembered.

There should be a musical play, and a good one, when a librettist and a composer get together on a story of Nantucket's whaling days, combined with those of the era when 'Sconset was a summertime playground for famous folk of the theatrical profession. But "The Girl From Nantucket" isn't it. It isn't anything, really, except a ragged and tiresome exhibit from beginning to end.

In Henry Adrian's new production they've put song and dances to some sort of story of the islanders wanting an artist to do a museum mural depicting the glories of the Nantucket fishing fleet and of a romantic young house painter being engaged by mistake. They run out of book material very early and begin going in for gags and acrobatics and it's all quite overpoweringly dull most of the time.

There are some performers at the Adelphi who, with material, can be of a lot of help to a musical show. Jane Kean is pretty and spirited. Jack Durant has been known to be funny in a violent sort of way, and Helen Raymond was a hearty clown in "One Touch of Venus" and also in "The Pink Lady—in St. Louis. But these players, along with Bob Kennedy and Billy Lynn, are serving a lost cause at the Adelphi. And for somebody a very expensive one.

Rapps and Tapps do offer some lively dancing, and it would have been all right with me had they gone on indefinitely. Jane Kean has a song with a bawdy burlesque flavor, "Let's Do and Say We Didn't," that stirred some of last evening first-nighters from their slumber. The settings of Albert Johnson do not represent this designer at his best.

An off-islander like myself, with great fondness for Nantucket, I was hoping for something better than the stolid and completely incompetent musical show that has found its way into the Adelphi.

THE GIRL FROM NANTUCKET, a musical comedy in two acts and fourteen scenes. Book by Paul Seamford, Harold Sherman and Hi Cooper, based on a story by Fred Thompson and Berne Giler. Songs by Jaques Belasco, Kay Twomey, Hughie Prince and Rick Rogers. Book directed by Edward Clarke Lilley; choreography by Val Raset; settings and lighting by Albert Johnson; costumes by Lou Eisele; production assistant, Harry Howell; staged and produced by Henry Adrian. At the Adelphi Theater.

Michael Nicolson	Bob Kennedy
Betty Ellis	(Evas.) Adelaide Bishop (Mats.) Pat McClarney
Tom Andrews	George L. Hindley
Ann Ellis	Marion Niles
Dodey Ellis	Jane Kean
Keziah Getchel	Helen Raymond
Judge Foley	John Robb
Captain Matthew Ellis	Billy Lynn
Dick Oliver	Jack Durant
Enrico Nicoletti	Richard Clemens
The Corporation	(The Four Buccaneers) Paul Shiers, John Panter, Don Cortes, Joseph Cunneff
Roy, Caleb and Several Other Fellows	Johnny Raper
Mary	Connie Hadden
Dance Specialists	(Kim and Kathy Gaynes (Rapps and Tapps
Solo Dancer	Tom Ladd

"The Girl from Nantucket"—*continued*

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

NOVEMBER 9, 1945

= By HOWARD BARNES =

SOS—Lady in Distress

A DUBIOUS formula has been employed in concocting "The Girl From Nantucket." The new musical at the Adelphi takes a bad book, dresses it up with wheezy gags, sets it to very ordinary music and lyrics and tosses in a weirdly dull ballet about a Whale and a Fisherman fighting for the caresses of the Sea. Since the performers in this latest Henry Adrian production are neither expert nor engaging enough to go it on their own, the show emerges in all its unseemly contours. There was a time when Broadway song and dance shows, however conventionel, had pace, excitement and class. They are qualities which you will look for in vain on Fifty-fourth Street.

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The one bright interlude in a welter of creaking ineptitudes is a number which might just as well have been spotted in a cabaret. It is a dance specialty by a pair of wonderful Negro hoofers, Rapps and Tapps. They are as engaging as they are expert. They lend a fleeting distinction to an utterly undistinguished entertainment. Unfortunately, it is impossible to build a musical comedy around a couple of graceful fast-steppers. Most of "The Girl From Nantucket" is dedicated to off-color and far from funny lyrics and jokes that have whiskers all the way up to the eyebrows. Even a cut and dried romance is unkempt.

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The libretto, if you really care, has to do with a house painter who is mistakenly hired to execute a mural in a Nantucket museum and is saved fro mhis predicament by a talented girl friend. It is not much to work with at best. It is subjected to nothing short of mayhem at the Adelphi. Bob Kennedy and Adelaide Bishop intone the love songs with better fluorish than voice. Jack Durant, Helen Raymond and Billy Lynn try to make something of the comic by-play, but they rarely squeeze laughter out of the stony situations in which they are involved.

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Jane Kean is altogether the best of the principals. Even when she has to sing such doggerel as "When a Hick Chick Meets a City Slicker," or the sputtering "Let's Do and Say We Didn't," she does it with an air. Compared to the other players, she is downright vibrant. For the records, Jacques Belasco composed most of the music, which is ably conducted by Harry Levant; Kay Twomey is to blame for most of the lyrics, and Albert Johnson has designed some rather fetching settings for an offering which is about as fetching as an elk's mating call.

New York Post

NOVEMBER 9, 1945

'The Girl From Nantucket' A Vapid Musical Comedy

By Wilella Waldorf

An oppressive and generally spiritless musical comedy entitled "The Girl From Nantucket" arrived last night at the Adelphi Theatre. Our first-night tickets read $7.20 each and although the stage often seemed to be quite crowded and there were enough book, lyric and music writers listed in the program to outfit a Hollywood superfilm, surprisingly little seemed to happen of the slightest moment. If the producers wish to lift something from this review for advertising purposes, they may quote us as saying, "It lacks everything."

The statement, of course, is a trifle exaggerated, but then such things usually are. There are one or two items about "The Girl from Nantucket" that must be mentioned by the conscientious reviewer. And were we conscientious! Stayed until nearly 10:30 p.m. when the first act finally came to an end with a tribute to the sea, a long-winded monologue specially written for the occasion and lavishly interpreted by a "Whaler's Ballet."

For a considerable period before that a plot was in evidence from time to time concerning the determination of a group of Nantucketers to hire an artist to paint a mural in the Nantucket Museum. After raising the handsome sum of $1,000 for this purpose, they sent an ex-sea captain (drunken) to New York to hire the artist. He brought back Michael Nicholson, a house painter, instead of Enrico Nicoletti, a mural artist.

This side-splitting situation developed, if you care to use the word, into a series of routine love songs, presented in an equally routine manner by Bob Kennedy and Adelaide Bishop; some on the whole unsuccessful comedy efforts by Jack Durant and Billy Lynn, and several smutty songs of no distinction whatever put over far better than they were worth by Jane Kean, who deserves better material but would have seemed hopelessly out of place here if she had had it.

For the rest Rapps and Tapps, a couple of Negro boys, did some stepping that, like most Negro tapping, was peppy, and Albert Johnson's settings often appeared to have been designed for a smarter show than "The Girl from Nantucket."

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★★

DAILY NEWS

NOVEMBER 9, 1945

'Girl From Nantucket" Is Season's Low for Musicals, and That's Low

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In "The Girl From Nantucket," a musical comedy which opened last night at the Adelphi Theatre, there is Jack Durant, an old vaudeville clown and a very good one, working hard. There are Jane Kean, a personable comedienne; Helen Raymond, who wears feather boas and funny hats; Billy Lynn, who talks the way a Maine lobster would talk if it could talk, and an excellent pair of Negro dancers named Kim and Kathy Gaynes.

In "The Girl From Nantucket" is some Albert Johnson scenery, one item of which—"Old Nantucket"—is very good. In the orchestra pit is a set of musicians directed by the able Harry Levant, but they have no music to work with and cannot, being good musicians, keep up with the flatting going on upon the stage. The flats at the Adelphi would clear up New York's housing shortage if they could be rented out.

To a lover like myself of the American musical comedy, this show is 90% torture. Its lyrics, by Kay Twomey, are so desperately smart they hurt, and Jacques Belasco's score would sound just as good if Mr. Levant's men played it upside down. I think a congressman would lose his franking privilege if he ever tried to mail the plot free to a constituent—or, better, to an opponent.

The first-act finale is a ballet which is a gem of horrid pretentiousness in which, while some dancers nearly bust their suspenders being symbolic, a man recites a narrative poem which sounds like a Debating Society oration by a combination of Carl Sandburg, Joseph C. Lincoln and the March of Time.

At one point Mr. Durant says he is all tired out and Miss Kean asks him what he has been doing. "Breathing all day," says Mr. Durant.

Jack, old friend, you just try breathing and listening to "The Girl from Nantucket" at one and the same time. Then you really will be pooped. I know because I've just tried it.

PM Evening

NOVEMBER 9, 1945

—Kronenberger—

Why Malign Nantucket?

PM Reviews

A small mass meeting, indignantly attended by all those who have fond memories of Nantucket, wouldn't come at all amiss today. For last night that irreproachable, hospitable, charming island took the beating of its long history. Mr. Henry Adrian, who only a short season or so back produced one of the worst of all straight plays, *Victory Belles*, has now with *The Girl From Nantucket* produced one of the sorriest of all musical comedies. The least he could have done was to give the thing a more suitable title, such as *The Girl From Dannemora* or *The Girl From Death Valley*.

No need going into much detail about it. It takes place on Nantucket all right, but you won't sniff any invigorating salt sea air. It's just everything wormy in Broadway gags, everything shopworn in Tin Pan Alley tunes, everything cheap in burleycue suggestiveness; and beyond that, generally dimwitted. When, in the first ten minutes, a man is asked, "Aren't you taking along a bag?" and answers "No, she's not coming with me," you pretty well know what's in store for you. Pretty well; you can't for example, know about the ballet. *A Page From Old Nantucket*, they call it; and I won't say more than that it contains a woman who symbolizes the sea, a whale who gets fresh with her, and a fisherman who, all through the hot stuff, chants poetry. *A Page From Nantucket* . . quite soundly followed by the intermission.

A great many people are bound up in all these macabre doings; much the most talented and attractive of them is Jane Kean. Miss Kean has looks and personality and can put over a song, and deserves a far better fate than handing out awful dialogue and singing smutty ditties.

I shrudder to think what may be next on Mr. Adrian's agenda.

—Louis Kronenberger

The New York Times

NOVEMBER 9, 1945.

Musical Comedy, 'The Girl From Nantucket,' Abounds in Jokes Reminding of Waves on Beach

By LEWIS NICHOLS

There is no point in getting too angry about it, because Henry Adrian apparently is bound to do this sort of thing every now and then. Two years ago it was "Victory Belles," which won considerable prestige among admirers of the bizarre in the theatre. Last evening it was "The Girl From Nantucket," opening at the Adelphi. Had Mr. Adrian been linking the productions in some weird parlay, it probably would be safe to say this morning that he had lost. The new musical likely is not the worst seen since the beginning of understanding, although for at least part of the time it runs a good race. It is bad enough for the moment.

"The Girl From Nantucket" suffers from all the ills to which musical comedy flesh is heir; there is only a difference in degree. The book, tossed up by a group operating under the collective name of Paul Stanford, plus Harold Sherman, is peculiar even in this age of peculiarities. With a basal plot about the hiring of a house painter instead of a mural painter, it permits bad jokes to roll in like the waves on Nantucket's beach, with every seventh a real classic of its kind. The music, by Jacques Belasco, is a little better, but not enough to cause a riot among the tune publishers. The dances quite often consist of dancers holding other dancers in the air without droping them, which is at least the beginning of wisdom.

No doubt the performers are to be pitied rather than scorned, although they might be justified in chasing the contributors of material pell-mell through the streets. Jack Durant is there with the Jack Durant brand of comedy, and while it may not have a universal appeal that is a matter of taste. Jane Kean is there, doing far better than her lines and the songs she has to sing. Bob Kennedy and Adelaide Bishop are present to carry the leading tunes, which they do without causing too much excitement either way. Rapps and Tapps do a pleasant moment of tap-dancing; Billy Lynn, who used to be William Lynn in those funny comedies, is lost; Helen Raymond acts the part of something like a dowager tramp.

"The Girl From Nantucket" generally seems to be one of those occasions when everyone is willing to try, but no one is present to offer a good idea and then see that it is executed. The ship for the islands never gets away from Woods Hole.

New York World-Telegram

NOVEMBER 9, 1945.

By Burton Rascoe

'The Girl from Nantucket' We Advise You—Duck It

Scores of first-nighters at the opening of "The Girl from Nantucket" at the Adelphi last night gave their verdict on the show before the drama critics had a chance to do so. They walked out on it with very audible words of disparagement.

But "The Girl from Nantucket" is not (quite) that bad. Cut to half its length, it would be a pretty fair substitute for the burlesque shows which some of us used to enjoy (now and then) before Commissioner Moss decided that burlesque shows were not good for our morals and padlocked them.

Still, I must say that, if there is anyone among you whose morals are easily subverted, you should stay away from "The Girl from Nantucket," because the lyrics of the song hit, "Let's Do and Say We Didn't," sung by Jane Kean, make Gertrude Niesen's "I Wanna Get Married" sound like a Sunday school hymn. It is not the least bit suggestive; it is, as James Gleason used to say, the works. If you are young and romantic, you may find it embarrassing and not in the best taste.

Music Low Grade.

"The Girl from Nantucket" has no book, in the usual sense, and no music in any sense at all. The music in Tinpan Alley stuff of the sort which Mr. Schirmer and Mr. Berlin used to have to listen to (for three minutes) when some ambitious hopeful would come in and say, "Listen! I got a song that'll wow 'em!"

The story is that a house painter used binoculars to watch a girl across the street get dressed and undressed, and then was so attracted by her that he got a job painting the outside sills of her bathroom window. By error he was awarded a commission to paint murals for a museum at Nantucket. He couldn't paint anything except surfaces, so the gal whom he had been looking at through his binoculars—who was an art student—did the job for him.

Good Talent Lost.

A great deal of real stage talent is lost on this unfortunate show, including the work of that delightful comic, William Lynn, and of that electric comedienne, Jane Kean, who have no material and therefore are whipped, except for Miss Kean's bawdy song aforementioned, Jack Durant, Adelaide Bishop and Marion Niles (all three of whom have nice voices) work hard, as do Bob Kennedy and Helen Raymond and some of the others. But they are just in a bad show and can't rise above it.

The most gratifying performers of the evening were two Negro tap dancers, Rapps and Tapps They are wonderful, but their bit is brief. Kim and Kathy Gaynes, who are also featured dancers appearing from time to time, are very good also; but they do two dances which would have made the Minsky brothers blush.

Journal-American

NOVEMBER 9, 1945

'Girl From Nantucket' Opens at the Adelphi

By ROBERT GARLAND

Last night turned out to be an endurance contest between "The Girl from Nantucket" up on the stage of the Adelphi Theatre and The Audience from Manhattan down in the auditorium. There were moments when I feared the make-believe off-islanders were going to win. For the contestants from Massachusetts kept going on and on, while the contestants from New York kept going out and out.

But a couple of handfuls of local lads remained until the end, one handful composed of backers who were exhausted from applauding and another handful composed of critics who were just exhausted. I, for my part, am still exhausted, for "The Girl from Nantucket" has both too little and too much of everything. Which is a kinder way of reporting that it has quantity, not quality.

There're too many composers and too many lyricists; too many librettists and too many gagsters; too many directors and too many choreographers; too many players and too many dancers; too many scenes and too many costumes; too many plots and too many press agents. All these could be fewer. All these could be better. Except, perhaps, the last-named. They could be discarded.

* * *

Gotham Godiva

The Adelphi's musical misdemeanor is what they call a "book show." That is to say, "The Girl from Nantucket" sets out to tell a story. And tell a story it does, for two acts, 14 scenes, a prologue and no good reason. It's about a Peeping Tom who is also a house painter and a Lady Godiva who has no horse on which to ride. She has a window in which to undress, however.

So Peeping Boy meets Horseless Girl beneath the Queensboro Bridge on the island of Manhattan. Peeping Boy loses Horseless Girl in the Historical Museum on the island of Nantucket. And Peeping Boy wins Horseless Girl in the Public Square designed by Albert Johnson; he in makeup designed by Prince Matchabelli, she in hairdo designed by Charles of the Ritz. They're really lovely.

But Peeping Boy doesn't walk away with Horseless Girl until a plodding plot about a Massachusetts mural has been unraveled. It's a plodding plot involving a widow-woman called Keziah Getchel, a widow-man called Capt. Ellis, a lovelorn lady called Betty Ellis and a lovelorn gentleman called Michael Nicolson, a female called Dodey and a male called Enrico, and a quartet called The Buccaneers.

* * *

Backers' Delight

From time to time there're songs made up out of their own heads, aided by their own memories, by Jacques Belasco and Kay Twomey, with additional music and lyrics by Hughie Prince and Dick Rogers. And words made up out of their own heads, abetted by their own memories, by Paul Stanford and Harold Sherman, with additional dialogue and funny sayings by Hy Cooper.

These, the songs and the sayings, are entrusted to Jack Durant, "retrieved" from film houses, radio and night clubs; Jane Kean, known as "the kinetic Kean" because of her "radiance from an inner fire"; Bob. Kennedy, an erstwhile Curley from the current "Oklahoma"; Helen Raymond, a graduate of "Twin Beds" and the St. Louis Opera, and Billy Lynn, one of the original "Three Men on a Horse."

These, along with Adelaide Bishop and George Headley, are featured featured performers. But it's the dancing team of Rapps and Tapps that steps away with such honors as "The Girl from Nantucket" has to offer. The rest is musical-comedy which is neither tuneful nor funny, a song-and-dance concoction only a backer could—and did!—love from eight-thirty until half-past-eleven.

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"The Secret Room"

PM

NOVEMBER 8, 1945

—Kronenberger

A Thriller In Name Only

PM Reviews

For all its psychiatric trimmings, *The Secret Room* doesn't put much of a burden on the critic. All that really needs to be said about it can be said in one sentence: Mr. Turney's new play is meant to be menacing, and isn't. Not the least bit. Far from being frightened, or fascinated, or even just plain interested, I was most of the time bored stiff.

Mr. Turney is writing of yet another of those females who first charm their way into a family and then cause mischief right and left. This one is not a born villainess, but a deranged victim of the Nazis—Dachau, rape, an illegitimate child that had been taken away from her. The Beverly family didn't know much of this, however; for one reason because, to keep them from knowing, the lady murders the doctor who would have told them.

Having got away with the murder, Leda Ferroni made great progress inside the Beverly household. She got the Beverly children to adore her and to loathe their mother. This led to a Situation exhibiting Leda at her most menacing and murderous—but somehow, like everything that went before, it didn't seem to matter.

The trouble with *The Secret Room* is that it's much too slow, talky, uninventive and unatmospheric to stand a chance as an out-and-out thriller; and that it's no better as psychological drama because Mr. Turney uses Leda chiefly for plot purposes. He doesn't make a real character of her, or even a real case; she is neither horrifying nor pitiable.

The production is no great help, either. I doubt whether there was any pace or suspense to be had of *The Secret Room*, but in any case Moss Hart hasn't supplied them. Doubtless he was kept busy working with little Jane Earle and little Fuzzy McQuade, two youngsters with very sizable parts. They acquit themselves nicely, but the parts seem needlessly big. Eleanora Mendelssohn plays Leda with a certain stagey skill that for me got less and less rewarding as the evening wore on. Frances Dee, Reed Brown Jr. and Grace Coppin have the other roles, which they fill agreeably without doing much acting.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

'The Secret Room'

A new play by Robert Turney. Presented by Joseph M. Hyman and Bernard Hart, in association with Halla Stoddard, last night at the Royale Theatre. Directed by Moss Hart. Setting by Carolyn Hancock. Lighted by Frederick Fox.

THE CAST

Noonie Beverly	Jane Earle
Susan Beverly	Frances Dee
Sister	Fuzzy McQuade
Dr. John Beverly	Reed Brown Jr.
Mrs. Smitkin	Juanita Hall
Margaret Beverly (Mac)	Grace Coppin
Dr. Jackson	Ivan Simpson
Leda Ferroni	Eleonora Mendelssohn
Colonel Hammond	Albert Bergh
Sergeant Samuels	Charles S. Dubin

Journal-American

NOVEMBER 8, 1945

'Secret Room' Opens At Royale Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

Looking back through many a year of professional first-nighting, I don't remember spending a more unrewarding evening in the theatre than I spent last night at the Royale. There, under the sponsorship of Joseph Hyman and Bernard Hart, in association with Haila Stoddard, was exposed "The Secret Room," a "psychological thriller" by Robert Turney. He of "Daughter of Atreus"!

Even in the actorish hands of Frances Dee, Reed Brown, Jr., Grace Coppin and Eleanora Mendelssohn, even in the directorial hands of Moss Hart, "The Secret Room" adds up to a sadistic session of uncomfortable, uncalled-for play-going. In the first place, Mr. Turney fails to provide his players with something to play with. In the second place, his players persistently pretend he has.

The result is embarrassing, as well as uncomfortable and uncalled for. To make things harder, Jane Earle and Fuzzy McQuade speak and squeal gruesome games upstairs, downstairs and in the hidden chamber of Carolyn Hancock's living room somewhere in the country, somewhere in America. Hollywood, I presume! If any children should be seen, not heard, Jane and Fuzzy are the ones.

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Pillow Murders

The arrival in 45th st. has to do with Leda Ferroni. In spite of the Italian aspect of her name, Leda is a big sister to Emil Bruchner in year-before-last's "Tomorrow the World" and a little sister to Margaret Brennan in week-before-last's "The Next Half Hour." With sofa-cushion killing as her side line, she murders an innocent bystander without giving it a second thought.

Accepting her at her word, Leda has had a nasty time of it with Nazis overseas. Coming to America, a well-intentioned Dr. Jackson wishes her on the Beverly family, the father of which is a psychiatrist-soldier, the mother of which is a painter-housewife and the offspring of which are the Noonie and the Sister who should be seen, not heard. Taking them as they come, they're practically untakable.

In the course of a tortuous, contrived and consistently baffling narrative, Leda Ferroni manages to run her American benefactors ragged. She steals the life of Dr. Jackson. She steals the children of John and Susan Beverly. She steals the job of Mrs. Smitkin, maid-of-all-work to the stupid members of the house of Beverly. As far as I'm concerned, she's welcome to them!

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Word's Preposterous

So preposterous is the story "The Secret Room" sets out to tell so preposterous are the characters "The Secret Room" endeavors to portray, so preposterous are the fictions "The Secret Room" asks the audience to believe, that the play Robert Turney has tried to write and the players Moss Hart has tried to direct become anything but the most preposterous sort of make-believe.

To put it nicely, the acting is worthy of the play. As the Leda Ferroni who turns out to be everything a refugee should not be, Eleonora Mendelssohn is as incredible as the character she is required to represent. That's right smart incredible! Never for a moment do I believe in either her or her Signora Ferroni. Neither, for that matter, does she. Or the Moss Hart who directed them.

Frances Dee is pretty but incredible as Susan Beverly. Reed Brown, Jr., is manly but incredible as John Beverly. Juanita Hall is brooding but incredible as Mrs. Smitkin. And so it goes, down to and including Jane Earle as Noonie and Fuzzy McQuade as Sister. Until last night, I was yet to see a child actor who was definitely not good. . . Definitely not good goes also for "The Secret Room" as a play, a performance or a production.

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DAILY NEWS

NOVEMBER 8, 1945

'The Secret Room' Lacks Thrills Despite Psychiatric Background

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Hello, Doctor. . . . I'm fine, thanks. How are you? . . . That's good. I always like to think a doctor is feeling all right these days. . . . Well, Doc, to be truthful about it, I wouldn't be coming to see you right now if I really was fine. I think I am a little nuts and maybe you can help me.

Sure, I'm perfectly relaxed right now. Nothing on my mind whatever—except that I went to a play last night at the Royale Theatre on 45th St. It was called "The Secret Room."

Was there a secret room? Doc, it was the biggest secret room you ever saw. The house was in the country, see? They didn't say in the program what country but I suppose it was somewhere around here. Long Island, Westchester or Connecticut, because that's all a playwright ever thinks of as country. Robert Turney was the playwright of this show.

Well, anyhow, this secret room was the biggest damned thing you ever saw. Not a little place with a little door in a little room, but a great big set of double doors opening right off the living room, where if they ever tried dusting the place they would have wondered what was behind those wood panels several years before this play called "The Secret Room" ever started.

Small Girls' Secret.

All right, Doctor, just let me be. I'm all right, I tell you, and let me get around to this in my own way. Okay? . . . Well, the only ones who know about this secret room are a couple of little girls, acted by Jane Earle and Fuzzy McQuade—dammit, Doc, I am not lying. The program says this actress is named Fuzzy McQuade. She is awful cute but you can't understand much of what she says.

It's sort of funny about these little girls being the only ones to know about the secret room, because their father is a psychiatrist and their mother is a nice-looking number named Frances Dee, from Hollywood. You would think a lady from Hollywood or a psychiatrist, even if he is in the army, would have found out about such a thing.

Yes, Doctor, I know I am rambling a bit, but what are you being paid for? Anyhow, into this place with the secret room comes a refugee woman who seems to be a little nuts, too. A doctor brings her here. And the first thing she does is kill the doctor. I think she did, anyway. He looked very stiff and dead on the couch after she got through.

Who's Loony Now?

And then this refugee woman, who apparently had had a very hard time of it before she became a refugee, took over the household. She was very nice and the children liked her. They liked her so much they turned against their own mother, because the new woman could play the piano. And they showed her the secret room, which had little to do with the plot.

The next thing you know, Doc, this woman is trying to kill the mother by smothering her with a pillow just the way she killed the fellow who brought her there. I guess she is a little goofy. They tell me that by the end of the third act she really goes crazy and they have to take her away.

But I came to you before this happened, Doc. I think I am a little nuts and maybe you can help me. Should I go to plays any more? Should I have seen "The Secret Room," which had a double door designed by Carolyn Hancock and had Eleanora Mendelssohn playing the crazy woman and Reed Brown Jr. appearing occasionally as the psychiatrist, or should I have stood in bed?

I think I should have stood in bed, Doc, even though Moss Hart did direct this play. But you would know better than I would and I hope your fee isn't too much.

The Sun

NOVEMBER 8, 1945

'The Secret Room' Offers Scant Suspense, and It's Frequently Preposterous.

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

The producers and the director who gave the town an enormously amusing comedy in "Dear Ruth" have now turned to chill and shudder drama in "The Secret Room," and it's a thriller that doesn't come off. Joseph M. Hyman and Bernard Hart, in association with Haila Stoddard, made the presentation last night at the Royale.

There are a few scary moments in this new play by Robert Turney, but for most of the way it is labored and straggling. It is frequently preposterous. And if you went to the Royale, as I did, expecting a taut melodrama, packed with suspense, you came away greatly disappointed.

The usually perceptive Moss Hart has done the staging of "The Secret Room," as he did with such fabulously successful exhibits as "Dear Ruth" and "Junior Miss." He must have seen things in the script that were by no means visible to me at the premiere performance in 45th street.

Turney's play is a story of the terror and disruption brought into a pleasant American home by a refugee, a concert pianist, who was subjected to endless brutalities at the hands of the Nazis. She experienced the ordeal of enforced prostitution, and her infant child, unwanted in the beginning, was taken from her by the enemy. In the course of three acts the psychopathic and self-tortured Leda, with her overwhelming maternal frustrations and her homicidal tendencies, kills an old doctor, nearly kills a young mother after trying to turn her children against her, and fails in a kidnaping attempt. She is finally revealed to be about as batty as a mortal can be.

"The Secret Room" is thinly spread. There are long waits between its tingling situations. Turney's dialogue is on the stilted side and there is great improbability about the whole thing. Eleonora Mendelssohn isn't particularly successful in her projection of the deranged Leda, who seeks to take the Beverly children as her own. Her performance often suggests that of a stock company villainness out of a melodrama of the long ago.

Frances Dee gets better results as the young mother, almost done in by strangulation. This seems to be the season for screen stars to be trying their charms on Broadway and Miss Dee comes through nicely. She is attractive in voice and manner, and handles herself very capably indeed. I hope that she will be around long enough to get herself a better play. Jane Earle and Fuzzy McQuade are all over the place as the two children. They perform as directed, but have a great deal to do and often get a little tiresome. Reed Brown Jr. hasn't much of a part in the role of the father. Ivan Simpson, in the New York theater since the wonderful days of "The Man From Home," plays the old doctor. Carolyn Hancock designed the setting, secret room included.

The tidings from 45th street are not so good. "The Secret Room" is an inferior variation of "Guest in the House."

New York World-Telegram

NOVEMBER 8, 1945

By Burton Rascoe

'The Secret Room' Loses Effect by Poor Direction

The opening of Robert Turney's "The Secret Room" at the Royale last night was a dismal fiasco and (though maybe I am wrong) I don't think it should have been. The play has a sound and original idea in it; and it is an idea which is presented, in spots, with deep effectiveness. Yet the drama went to pieces, time after time, in such a way that it had the audience giggling at the ineptitudes.

Mr. Turney got a bad break with the production of his "Daughters of Atreus," a tragedy in the classical form, which was modeled upon Euripides (although, perhaps, a bit less like Euripides than like a Gilbert Murray translation of Euripides). He has had, I suspect, even a worse break in the production of "The Secret Room."

Many Ineptitudes.

I haven't seen the original script of "The Secret Room," and possibly Mr. Turney is just a bad playwright. But I doubt this; for I read the manuscript of "Daughters of Atreus" before it went into production, and I don't think that the man who wrote that play would be guilty of some of the corny ineptitudes which disfigure "The Secret Room." I give you just one example:

Mind you, "The Secret Room" is a tragic drama, based (as I see it) upon the severest forms of Aristotlian principles. A mad woman is introduced into the home of overly generous people of misplaced good-intentions and very soon she has committed one murder, has tried to commit another and has messed up the whole household, before she is led away to an insane asylum—because she found, in this household, a release for her frustrated maternal instincts.

This may sound complicated; but it would make sense, if the production allowed the sense to be made. But, in the first act, when the situation is being established, there is thrown in (presumably for audience laughs) one of the most bewhiskered of gags, namely, the reply of a child as to whether she would prefer a little baby brother or a little baby sister, which is "What other kind are there?"

If Mr. Turney wrote that fungus (and some other idiocies) into his script, he is rapidly losing whatever gifts he had in the matter of sense, dignity and taste. If he didn't write such objectionable lines, but agreed to them, he is out of luck. For, the Dramatists' Guild contract stipulates that a producer, or director cannot change the text of a playscript without the consent of the author.

Directed by Hart.

The drama is directed by Moss Hart, who has considerable gifts as a playwright, but, so far as I can determine, no sense whatever about play direction.

Therefore, I can't tell whether the featured players in "The Secret Room" are good actors or merely as bad as they seem. Frances Dee may be a good actress, for instance; but last night she seemed to be directed as though she were a bad road-company imitation of Judith Anderson. Because of the staging, she and others in the cast were made often ridiculous. And (although I love children) I must say that the two kids in the show last night were almost unbearable.

I should like to see a good production of a carefully edited script of "The Secret Room," for I feel it has wisdom and beauty somewhere in it that was almost entirely lost last night.

The story is of a woman whose mind has been deranged by imprisonment in Dachau and by compulsory prostitution under the Gestapo, who is brought to America by an old physician who hopes a brilliant young American psychiatrist will be able to rehabilitate her. She murders the old doctor (her first benefactor) and tries to murder the psychiatrist's wife, after having turned the children of the psychiatrist against their mother, while the psychiatrist is in the armed service. She is led gently away, at last, a sad case.

A good tragic-drama idea meanwhile has been woefully botched.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

NOVEMBER 8, 1945

By HOWARD BARNES

Muddled Melodrama

A THWARTED maternal instinct is given full rein in Robert Turney's new play, "The Secret Room." Far from leading to sweetness and light, it involves a hapless cast at the Royale in a murder, an attempted homicide, a preposterous mental and emotional kidnaping and a fine case of stark staring madness. Turney is always on the edge of writing a somber tragedy about spiritual starvation, but it is forever teetering the wrong way. In Moss Hart's staging and the performing, the work is given more than an even break. It is still a disappointing and curiously pretentious offering.

There is a singular confusion of issues in "The Secret Room." The plot skeleton is quite adequate to a simple thriller, as it parades a killer across the stage who is known as such only by a couple of tots and the audience. There are passages of savage suspense and moments of florid violence. On top of this framework, the author has considered the irreparable damage that has been worked on a victim of a Nazi concentration camp, the travail of a wife whose husband goes off to the wars in the spring of 1944, and the general problem of bringing up children properly. Before the final curtain the production becomes a considerably muddled melodrama.

"The Secret Room" is particularly turbid in its excursions into the mother-child relationship. It is quite possible to accept the fact that a broken refugee would become so possessive about the youngsters intrusted to her care that she would attempt to wean them from their rightful parent, even to the point of striking down those who suspect that she is a bit off the beam. The reaction of the kids is hard to take. They are not only moderately monstrous, but quite phony, as they shun their mother for the former inmate of Dachau. Far too much of "The Secret Room" rings false.

As for the acting, it is generally superior. Eleonora Mendelssohn brings gravity and a certain beauty to the part of the lunatic who has escaped from Nazi terror. She handles the contradictions in the character with rare skill and her final mad scene is something of a triumph. Frances Dee, trying stage acting for the first time, after being a comparative screen veteran, is poised, and demonstrates a genuine range of expression. Little Fuzzy McQuade is properly obnoxious as the elder brat and Jane Earle is all right when you can hear her lines. Reed Brown jr., Juanita Hall and Ivan Simpson round out the performing with far more authority than is often evident in the script. "The Secret Room" is an embellished horror show, which loses most of its horror in exposition.

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The New York Times

NOVEMBER 8, 1945

Melodrama Falls Like a Pillow on Robert Turney's 'The Secret Room' at the Royale

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Robert Turney, who was among the classicists with "Daughters of Atreus," now has come down to earth with a hatchet or perhaps it is a pillow. His "The Secret Room," which opened last evening at the Royale, is a melodrama about a psychopathic lady with a love of children and a lust for killing interference. It also is a most improbable melodrama, made up largely of speeches which do not advance the state of pity and fear, and actions similarly negative. Using the young ones to touch up the note of horror, Mr. Turney has even made part of his play sentimental. "The Secret Room" is a combination of blood and toffee, which are hard to mix on the stage, and in this case spell complete defeat for the evening.

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Leda Ferroni had been an Italian concert pianist when the Nazis came to occupy Italy and forced her into prostitution. Her resultant child was taken from her, and at the start of the story she is in America, mentally ill, in the care of a friend who is a doctor. He wishes to place her in the home of a psychiatrist, but insists the latter must see her case history. She puts a pillow over the doctor's head, smothers him, gets the job and then starts about capturing the affections of the children. The lady of the house finds the case history—in the secret room, of course—and comes pretty close to having the pillow shoved over her pretty locks. Mr. Turney works this all out to the minimum discomfort of the right people.

The first trouble with "The Secret Room" is that as a story it doesn't make too much sense. Query A: Why does the doctor bring a psycopath to the home of a psychiatrist when the latter is to depart into the Army? Query B: Why doesn't the mother of the children recognize the peculiarities of the visitor, not as quickly as the audience, which is smarter, of course, but soon after? In too much of "The Secret Room" Mr. Turney has nothing to say to nudge his story along, either mentally or actively, and so he brings on the children for a romp with their toys. It is not only a cynical citizen who knows everything will turn out all right: even the most naive is aware no playwright will do harm to the little girls. Mr. Turney permits them no sleep at all, which is bad for the growing young.

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Eleonora Mendelssohn has a role to try the character of any actress, and not always is she successful as the luckless Leda. Possibly because of the wording, she cannot give her audience a sense of growing horror or danger, and a long soliloquy near the end is somewhat less well written than Hamlet's. When Mr. Turney is with her she is effective, but too often he is away. Frances Dee of the screen, making this a Broadway debut, is considerably less harassed as the mother of two daughters than they are in life, but more agreeable to look at. The two little girls are played by Jane Earle and Fuzzy McQuade; many of their actions are human enough, but they are around a great deal. Reed Brown Jr. is the father; Grace Coppin the aunt. Moss Hart directed for his brother, Bernard, and Joseph M. Hyman, who, in association with Haila Stoddard, are the producers.

New York Post

NOVEMBER 8, 1945

'The Secret Room' Won't Even Fool the Kiddies

By Wilella Waldorf

"The Secret Room," presented last night at the Royale Theatre, is apparently supposed to be a thriller, but the play is so childishly contrived that it is impossible for anybody connected with the production to make it seem anything but hopelessly artificial and lacking in conviction.

Robert Turney appears to have started out with the idea of writing a moving study of a European refugee who has been driven mad in a Nazi concentration camp, but is taken into the home of an American psychiatrist's family after being "cured." Instead of developing the character with the serious consideration it deserves, however, he has used Leda Ferroni merely as a bogey-woman in a vain attempt to give his audience goose pimples.

Leda Ferroni is supposed to have been an Italian concert pianist who fell into the hands of the Nazis and was sent to Dachau, where she had a child by one of her captors. The experience has left her with a terrible fear of ever having a normal home life of her own, yet her passion for children leads her to turn the Beverly youngsters against their mother and to make herself the leading influence in their lives.

It is not an easy story to render plausible on the stage, and Mr. Turney is amazingly maladroit in manipulating his players so that the plot may take its course. Even allowing for a certain amount of stupidity on the part of the young mother, it is impossible to imagine that she would toddle off to her studio leaving her children alone with a woman who had finally demonstrated beyond the shadow of a doubt that she was, to say the least, decidedly unbalanced.

"The Secret Room" is the sort of play in which nobody but the mad woman seems to have any sense whatever. Eleanora Mendelssonn plays Leda as effectively as possible under the circumstances but the play is too much for her as it goes on, and the final scene, supposed to be heart-rending, is merely maudlin.

Frances Dee, the film actress, making her Broadway debut as the young mother, is attractive and well-spoken in a role that calls for her to act like an idiot now and then, while Reed Brown Jr. seems pretty unhappy as the psychiatrist who doesn't even go upstairs to say hello to his baby because Leda says No. As for Grace Coppin, all she has to do is drop in a couple of times on her way to catch a train.

Moss Hart must have spent plenty of time and energy teaching Jane Earle and Fuzzy McQuade, the two little girls, their long roles, and it's too bad so much effort couldn't have been lavished on a better cause. Why Mr. Hart ever directed such a play at all we cannot imagine, except that he is said to be a pushover for anything with a psychiatrist in it.